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CHAPTER III

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THREE PEKING GUILDS

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•482 It will perhaps be best to picture in some detail the general pattern of the Peking guilds before analyzing comparatively our forty-two case studies. The Porters Guild, the Carpenters Guild and the Guild of the Blind have been selected as typical examples.

A. The Porters Guild

In the Porters or Carriers Guild we find a close-knit group of men who monopolize one form of semi-skilled labor in a definite area in the capital. There are different ways of carrying goods, designated in the Chinese language by different expressions. The term *kang chien* is used to describe the work of this guild and means to carry or balance an object such as baggage or furniture on the shoulder. This balancing is difficult and is learned only by considerable practice.

The Porters Guild is known as the *Kung Yi Chang Shan Cha Yeh Sheng Hui*. This means literally "The Public Welfare Enduring Righteousness Holy Tea Association." The central office is located in a temple in the Southern or Chinese City of Peking on a well-known street called *Nan Hsiao Shih* (South Small Market) in the temple known as the *Niang Niang Miao* (The Temple of Our Lady).

According to Mr. Liu, the head of the guild, the object of the association is frankly "to prevent outsiders from carrying goods."

Mr. Liu has written a description of the guild's activities

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under the Manchu Dynasty. The detailed specifications of the area and the character of the monopoly show vividly a very definite set of privileges enjoyed by the carriers. A close connection with the Manchu Court indicates also that certain services are demanded in exchange for these privileges. The following description is given largely in the words of Mr. Liu. 467* 482 ●

"In the Manchu Dynasty at the death of a royal concubine six groups of eighty persons each were required to carry the coffin in turn." There existed in Peking a system of special area monopolies for certain types of transporters. These special monopoly areas or concessions were known as "passes." There were fifty "passes" for funeral carriers, nine "passes" for carters and two "passes" for porters — a total of sixty-one "passes." In the case of the funerals mentioned the magistrates of two counties that have their headquarters in Peking, the Ta Hsing Hsien and the Wan P'ing Hsien, summoned ten from each of these "passes" to take their turn in carrying the coffin. In enumerating these types of coolies, however, our informant says, "those who carry coffins, those who carry sedan chairs, the cart drivers and the porters." If the ten carriers from any one "pass" are absent, the group is fined six taels of silver. This is an illustration of the services imposed upon the carriers by the Court. There is no evidence that there was regular pay for such services, but there probably was an ample tip.

The exact location of the special monopoly areas of the two porter "passes" is given: "One from *Ta Shih* (Big Market) at the *Ching Chung Miao* (Refined Loyalty Temple) to the *Chuang Yuan Chiao* (Scholar of Highest Rank Bridge) and the other from the last named bridge to the *Hung Chiao* (Red Bridge)." The places here mentioned are all in the Southern or Chinese City.

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*467 482 A system of fines was established to keep the porters in their own areas. At present if a group from one "pass" carries goods in another area he must pay to the other "pass" four cents on each dollar he earns while carrying goods in the forbidden area. This fine is then four per cent of his receipts. Formerly he had to pay two coppers on each ten coppers earned or twenty per cent. There appears to be in all the guilds in Peking this general tendency to lessen rigorous discipline. Within the "pass" there was, moreover, a rule against the stealing of a fellow-guildsman's business. "One cannot carry the things for which others have bargained."

Two reasons or "purposes" in addition to the advantages gained from monopoly are given for the founding of the guild — the insuring of protection against another group that formerly treated the porters badly and the acquiring of an important religious privilege.

Many furniture stores of the Southern City used these porters to carry goods to the homes of purchasers. The carriers were supposed to collect the money for the goods and take it to the stores. The porters give "persecution" by the storekeepers as one of the "reasons" for founding their guild. If the carrier failed to bring back the money for the purchases he was locked in the store and kept a virtual prisoner until he "paid up." When the guild was formed the "persecution" was discontinued. Evidently the cause for the "persecution" was also removed! Under guild organization, and with definite groups within the guild, each with its responsible head, the individual irresponsible coolie or an irresponsible group of coolies no longer failed to give over the purchasers' payments.

*467 482 788 The other "reason" for the founding of the guild was the yearly pilgrimage of practically the whole guild to a temple some thirty miles from Peking. How this particular

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guild came to assume special religious obligations to make this yearly pilgrimage is not clear from the records. Possibly at first the porters carried the supplies to the stores and tea booths erected by philanthropists in the vicinity of the temple to serve pilgrims coming to the yearly festival, and later they themselves became interested in the trip primarily in order to worship at the temple. At present the porters very evidently consider the trip as an act of worship.[1]

The monopolistic right both of the ordinary porter and of the head of the groups within the "pass" had a definite market value. "If the porter wants to sell his right to carrying things in his particular 'pass' he can get forty to fifty taels ($55.56 or $69.45). The buyer must provide two tables of feasts for guests (food for twenty persons)." The price for securing the more coveted position of leader of one of these groups is higher and the transaction more elaborate. Tea is served, presumably at the guild headquarters, for the public so that all may know of the transaction. The price for the transfer is $70, and a feast for twenty persons must also be served. As the present minimum wage for porters is 200 coppers ($.58) a day, the price for this last mentioned transfer (at the rate of exchange used in this study), without counting the expense of the feast, would be the equivalent of the wages for one hundred and twenty days' work. The fact that these privileges are sold for such a high price indicates both the economic value of the monopoly and its security.

The exact date of the founding of the guild is not known. It is stated that "the Holy Tea Association (in its present form) was established in the seventh year of the Emperor Hsien Feng (1857) and became well known in the city by the fourth year of Tung Chih (1865)." As in the case of many other guilds we thus have the record that the guild was "founded," "established" or "reestablished" in the

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*467 482 latter half of the nineteenth century. Similar information was given so often in the case of guilds believed to be very ancient that it seems safe to assume that these terms mean merely some definite type of reorganization and therefore throw no light on the original founding of the guilds.

Membership in the guild has become more restricted in recent years. Formerly any one who was duly approved was eligible to membership. His initiation fee was one tael ($1.39) payable each year for five years. There was also an apprentice system. Any one who finished satisfactorily one year of apprenticeship might be "counted as a member," though he must also be guaranteed by three members. He is also introduced to the stores where the porters have dealings. Those who guarantee the new member are held responsible for his good conduct.

*467 482 594 In more recent years the guild membership has been confined to "sons and brothers of guild members." The question as to why the base of membership was changed introduces an interesting field of speculation. It seems probable that in former days when there was a special relationship to the Court and when there were fewer or no jinrickishaws and of course no modern motor vehicles, the porters were more in demand than at present. With the coming of competitive groups the membership of the guild probably decreased in size. It is not surprising, then, with the background of family clan solidarity on the one hand and great economic pressure on the other, that the decreasing number of coveted positions should be reserved by present guildsmen for their immediate relatives. Initiation into the guild consisted in being conducted by one of the "elders" to the Niang Niang Temple and in the burning of incense by the new member.

*467 482 This organization had a distinctive method of collecting dues. The guild had arrangements with several of the

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furniture dealers whereby they were permitted to leave special cash boxes for guild use in the stores. Formerly when any group of guildsmen had finished a job one out of every ten coppers made was deposited in the cash box in the nearest of these stores. At present one out of every fifty coppers is thus deposited.

The guild head reported that the chief advantage of membership was that only members have the privilege of working. "They must be members, otherwise they are not eligible to do the work." It must not be forgotten that with the great surplus of labor and the appalling poverty in Peking, it is a privilege of a high order to have a steady job that no one can take away from you.

The emphasis throughout this report on the value of monopoly raises the question as to whether or not this emphasis is owing to the decadent condition of the guild. Presumably in older days these porters carried on a function of greater social importance than the present one. There probably was a larger number of porters and more work done, and the porters had a definite relationship to Court functions. The guild no doubt had steady influx of new members. Possibly there was pride in the quality of service rendered as well as satisfaction in the sense of security that the monopoly offered. With the decreasing membership and the narrowing of the functions the whole aim appears to be to hold fast for themselves and their relatives their precious economic privileges.

The guild is organized as follows: There are two "passes" in the Southern City. The Western "pass" has 40 "leaders" and 70 porters, while the Eastern "pass" has 4 leaders and 23 or 24 porters. The guild's operations are thus confined entirely to the Southern part of the city of Peking. The guild has approximately 180 members. It is ruled by four "elders," three from the West division and one from

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*467 ●482 the East divison. The group "leaders" are considered as minor officials of the guild. These minor officials are in charge of the arrangements for the transportation of goods and are "responsible for all loss" of property handled. The work of the "elders" is to mediate between members when in dispute or in trouble and to prepare for religious observances. The "elders" also have general supervision of finances. They see that the money is collected from the cash boxes for the yearly pilgrimage. A slip signed by the "elders" is required to authorize any payment by the treasurer. The office of elder is held for life or until the elder resigns. The position is "hereditary." Not only is membership in the guild now hereditary, but leadership is the special right of particular families.

Discipline in the guild is also in the hands of the elders. They have the right to "discharge an offending member" and to fine "those who have made trouble with others or who drink wine at the *Miao Feng Shan* (the temple to which they go on the pilgrimage). When two workers fight over getting a certain job the elders see that neither one gets it and turn the work over to another. For slight offenses the punishment is a payment of incense to be used at either of the yearly religious meetings. Grave offenses are punished by expulsion from the guild. "Punishments are determined by the elders and made public at the general meeting on the seventeenth day of the ninth moon." This refers to the yearly meeting at the Peking temple.

That in the mind of the head of the guild, who gave us our information, the leader's authority is reinforced by the members of the guild, is clear from this sentence: "Punishments must always be enforced. If the offender does not obey (the decison of the elders) he will have the whole group to deal with." Another evidence of the potential power of the rank and file is indicated by this statement:

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"If a head porter is too stingy he may be boycotted." The group head, who grinds the carriers down to the last copper and who keeps all the tips and profits above the regular wages, is likely to find a sullen group of men on his hands who are unwilling to undertake the job he has contracted for. 467* 482

Our informant, when asked to analyze the source of the guild's authority over the action of its members, checked off the following headings: "fear, tradition, mutual advantage, the personal influence of leaders." He added, significantly, in his own words, "the problem of a living." The guild insures that great essential, the full rice bowl.

Although the system of apprenticeship has now been abolished, certain details are reported regarding the past system. "The apprentice would divide his earnings with his master at the ratio of four to six." The term of apprenticeship was only one year. In semi-skilled labor, such as was carried on by the porters, it is natural that the time for training should be greatly reduced from the usual three years and three months required by most of the craft guilds.[1] The large proportion of earnings kept by the apprentices is very different from the custom in most guilds, where apprentices receive no regular earnings, but only special gifts or rewards at the festival season.

Two guild functions mentioned are the fixing of a minimum wage and the detailed regulation of the division of money for any one job carried out by a group of porters when the total amount is more than is required to pay the recognized wage to all concerned. The established minimum wage is 200 coppers ($.58). The amount actually bargained for a specific job is determined by the head of the group concerned and the person who employs the porters. Definite wages are paid the common porters. The profits on the job over and above these wages go in the West section or "pass" 465 467* 482

[1] *Cf.* p. 160.

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to the head of the group who made the bargain. In the East section or "pass" the surplus is divided among all who did the work. Furthermore, in the West section individual porters cannot bargain for a job directly. They must do only work agreed upon by the head of their group. The implication is that in the East section such direct bargaining is allowed. Here, then, we have minute regulations differing between the two divisions of this small guild, indicating a very fine differentiation and standardization of customary practice.

In discussing the functions of this guild, the head man reiterated the importance of the monopoly privilege. "Non-members are not allowed to carry goods for pay." The guild's principal function, then, is to see that no one other than a guild member carries on this type of work in guild territory.

Unlike most of the guilds studied, which have only one yearly meeting, this guild has two regular meetings, one at the *Miao Feng Shan,* or temple, on the sixth day of the fourth month, which is the objective of the yearly pilgrimage and the other at the Temple in Peking, the *Niang Niang Miao,* on the seventeenth day of the ninth month.

At the regular Peking meeting both the Heavenly Fairy Holy Mother and the God of Wealth, the other special patron saint of the guild, are worshiped. Incense is burned before them. Two feasts, instead of the usual one given by most guilds, are celebrated. These feasts are considered as primarily for the "guild gods." [1]

At this meeting "reports of the past accomplishments" of the guild are made. "Lectures on duty and conduct" are given. "The ill-behaved are publicly warned." Only important matters are brought up for settlement. All minor matters are "settled by the elders." There is "full attend-

[1] The details of the religious ritual are given on pp. 181-182.

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ance" and every one pays his dues. The total income reported for the last calendar year was 40,000 coppers ($115.94). The guild evidently owns part or all of the *Niang Niang Miao,* for it received "$70 rent from the temple" yearly. Additional funds are secured from "donations of incense money" by individuals, which may amount in each case to "several tens of coppers up to $1.00."

The religious ceremonies of this guild are more complicated than those of most of the organizations studied, for, as has been stated, there are two centers of worship: the temple thirty miles from Peking in the hills, known as the *Miao Feng Shan,* and the temple in Peking, the *Niang Niang Miao.* The feast and ceremonies in the Peking temple are reported to cost $70.00. On the sixth day of the fourth moon, after going by foot on the thirty-mile pilgrimage to the mountain temple, the goddess *Tien Hsien Sheng Mu* (Heavenly Fairy Holy Mother) is worshiped. Many details are given us regarding this pilgrimage.

The elders collect the money that has been deposited by the members in the cash boxes and organize the expedition. Large supplies of food are purchased for the travelers during the journey and the stay at the temple. The inventory of what is bought each year is as follows: 15 bags flour of Machine Brand,[1] 900 catties[2] of native flour, 300 catties of rice, 40 catties of kidney beans, 40 catties of vermicelli, 25 catties of salt. These provisions are transported in thirteen two-horse carts. If the funds of the guild treasury are insufficient for the expedition, all who take part in the pilgrimage help make up the deficit. Payment is made in four installments, each member being assessed from "several cents to more than $1.00."

[1] A common Western imported brand of flour sold in bags weighing about 53 lbs.

[2] One catty = 1⅓ pounds

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After arriving at their destination, the guildsmen join with other porters from outside the city and with cart-drivers in worshiping the mythological goddess of the Chinese pantheon, the Heavenly Fairy Holy Mother. One bunch of incense is burned in Peking at the guild temple before starting on the expedition, and another after returning. The total cost of the pilgrimage is estimated at $300.

On the way to the temple it is customary for the porters to present packages of tea leaves to the many tea booths along the wayside which serve the pilgrims. This gift is listed in the guild head's report as a " charity " of the guild. " There are about 40 tea stations along the road to *Miao Feng Shan* and to each the porters will donate either four catties of tea leaves, or one catty and 80 coppers ($.23) of incense money. Ten catties of tea leaves are presented to the *Miao Feng Shan* temple." In both the temples where the porters worship, the elders officiate during the ceremony. They arrange the incense and light it. They lead their fellow guildsmen in bowing with their heads to the ground three times before the guild god.

We are told that the guild is not so prosperous as in days of old. Formerly, during the Manchu Dynasty, when tribute messengers came from distant parts to the Court, the porters were used to carry their gifts and baggage. It is probable that many of these bearers of tribute may have come in through the southern gate of the Southern City of Peking and have passed through the monopoly area of this guild.

In spite of hard times, the guild head assures us that his organization is a close-knit and loyal group. In his own words, because of the hereditary monopoly of the guild, " the solidarity (of our members) could not be bad."

There was one revealing sentence regarding the former relation to the government: " Formerly (the guild was)

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under the control of the *Nan Cheng Ssu* (Southern City Police Headquarters) but not now." In another place he tells us a payment of 40 taels ($55.56) was necessary to buy a permit from *Nan Cheng Ssu* before a title of leader (of a group) was valid. It is evident that in the prosperous days when there was a change of leadership, the police got a fixed percentage before the transaction was valid.

We have, then, been describing an organization which constitutes a hereditary monopoly of what formerly was a rather significant and important occupation in the capital. We find evidence down to the present day of a very detailed organization and minute regulations. Since 1912 there has been no Manchu Court to which tribute could be brought. It is highly probable that much of the baggage corresponding to what was formerly carried by these porters now comes in by train either from the Southwest or from the East, thus eliminating in many cases the necessity of transportation by hand over the area monopolized by the guild. The close relation not only to the Court but to the police has been discontinued; but the ancient beliefs are cherished and many ancient regulations still persist in great detail.

B. The Carpenters Guild

The Carpenters Guild of Peking is known as the "Sacred Society of Lu Pan," the supposed originator of the carpenters' craft. It includes the ordinary house-builders and the carvers of wooden ornaments, but does not take in the furniture menders, who have a guild of their own. Its headquarters are at the *Ching Chung Miao* (Refined Loyalty Temple) in the Southern City in Peking. The description here given, unless otherwise indicated, is based entirely on information gathered by Mr. Chang, the nephew of the priest, through interviews with another Mr. Chang, aged about fifty, the foreman of the carpenters' shop. In the fol-

8: Lin E-5 (1927)1928 AF12 North China AF12

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REMOVING REFINED SALT

TWO TANK WASHERS

[Facing p. 97]